

**Testimony of Nancy Cowser, Vice President, Planning  
United Community & Family Services, Norwich**

***concerning***

**H.B. No. 6824 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING  
JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE.  
- Dept. of Social Services Budget for Healthy Start.**

Senator Bye, Rep. Walker, Senator Flexer and Rep. Abercrombie Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services, my name is Nancy Cowser and I am Vice President of Planning for United Community & Family Services, Inc. in Norwich. I am offering the following testimony regarding the elimination of Healthy Start in the Dept. of Social Services Budget.

The Healthy Start Program is a federal Health Service and Resource Administration (HRSA) initiative **mandated** in 1991 to reduce the rate of infant mortality and improve perinatal outcomes. Connecticut's Healthy Start Program uses a service delivery model to provide comprehensive medical and psycho-social risk assessments, care plan development, and care coordination that includes health education and case management services. Healthy Start is a community-based program offered at local health departments, federally qualified community health centers and hospitals. The program is funded with state and **federal matching funds**.

Current Healthy Start funding of \$1.4 million is an investment in the health of Connecticut's future generation. The program costs a modest \$280 per participant, and **SAVES THE STATE** over \$2 million dollars in prevented costs associated with pre-term birth for the estimated 5,000 women and children the program serves. This estimate **does not** include the savings of long-term costs associated with the ongoing health, developmental and educational effects of pre-term birth that require lifetime support.

Healthy Start is the gateway for pregnant women to health insurance, prenatal care, dental care, behavioral health and pediatric services; home visiting and fatherhood programs; WIC and nutrition services; smoking cessation; and, housing, food and other basic needs resources. Healthy Start case managers live and work in the communities they serve. They know the resources available in the community and can provide connections quickly and with a warm handoff to community service providers. One of the most important things our case managers do is teach clients how to navigate the fragmented system of health and human services in Connecticut, saving time and enabling families to access services quickly and efficiently. In addition to the loss of these community benefits, elimination of the Healthy Start program will result in layoffs of these front-line case managers, negatively affecting the state economy.

**On behalf of the most vulnerable women and children in Connecticut, I strongly urge the Human Services Committee to oppose the \$1.4 million Healthy Start funding elimination in the state budget. Protecting the Healthy**



**Start Program will protect the health and development of our youngest citizens and provide an investment in a strong future generation.**

Here are examples of our clients' stories:

*A mother of twin 2 month old baby girls recently moved to Connecticut from Florida and was referred to Healthy Start by a former Healthy Start client. The babies were having undiagnosed digestive issues and needed to see a doctor as soon as possible. Mom also needed a health care provider for herself. The Healthy Start case manager completed a HUSKY application and helped her make appointments for herself and the babies at the federally qualified health center where the case manager provides Healthy Start services. She also provided mom with a referral to the local WIC office as well as other resources in the community. Without Healthy Start, it may have taken this mom days, weeks or even months to find all of the resources that the Healthy Start case manager connected her to within a matter of hours. In addition, this mom now has a trusted person in the community that she can contact for future needs.*

*A young mother-to-be came to see the Healthy Start case manager for help applying for HUSKY A. Through the risk assessment she learned that the young woman was having marital problems. The depression screen revealed she was experiencing the signs of depression. Behavioral health services were discussed and, due to the case manager's ability to build trust, a behavioral health appointment was made immediately. The young woman was very thankful and stated that without Healthy Start she would not have had the courage to make the appointment herself. If the client had not received help from the Healthy Start Program, she would have had to apply for HUSKY either on the phone or online through Access Health CT. The risk assessment would have never taken place and her depression would have gone untreated, negatively impacting her health and that of her unborn baby.*

*From our Healthy Start Case Manager:*

*"Clients trust us and feel comfortable telling us about their needs. They know we are not judging them and we are able to help them and their unborn child. Clients tell me every day that they never know where to start when they learn they are pregnant. But coming to Healthy Start has helped them understand what they need to do in order to have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby."*

Thank you for your consideration.

Nancy Cowser  
Vice President, Planning  
UCFS  
Norwich, CT 06360  
860-822-4161 - Phone  
860-889-3450 – Fax  
ncowser@ucfs.org

